

Learning, fun and solidarity on the union representatives' spring trip



Efling's union representatives did not let the weather stop them from rounding off the working year together on a spring trip around South Iceland.

Efling's union representatives set off on a mystery tour of South Iceland at the end of the last working year. The spring trip rounded off their winter programme with learning, outdoor activities, good company and fun.

The day began with a session led by Viðar Þorsteinsson, Efling's Director of Education and Membership Affairs, on strike action and the role of union representatives in labour disputes. Afterwards, the group boarded buses without knowing where they were headed.

In South Iceland, the group split into two. One group explored Nauthúsagil, an impressive ravine below Eyjafjöll, while the other took a guided bus tour of the surrounding area, learning about the history and main landmarks of South Iceland.

At the end of the day, the groups reunited for lively team-building games. Activities included singing, forming a human pile and dancing on one foot. Spirits were high, and everyone threw themselves into the fun.

The spring trip is the final course of the union representatives' working

year, with invitations extended to those who have met the winter programme's attendance requirements. It recognises their participation and provides an opportunity to get to know one another better, strengthen connections and bring the year to a close together.



Singing, games and team-building brought the day to a lively close.



Good organization makes all the difference.

Work plans strengthen the role of union representatives

A new working year has begun for Efling's union representatives. One of this year's main developments is that each union representative now draws up a plan for their work at the workplace during an individual meeting with an Efling staff member.

These meetings have been taking place over the past few weeks, and most union representatives reading this newsletter will already have attended one. The aim is to help each representative organise their work, set clear and realistic goals, and make use of the support Efling offers throughout the year.

The work plan includes deciding which courses the union representative will attend and when they intend to hold workplace meetings. Regular support meetings are also scheduled, giving

representatives an opportunity to seek advice and assistance with their tasks.

Each plan reflects the circumstances of the workplace concerned. Other tasks may therefore vary, from recruiting more union representatives and mapping the workplace to surveying colleagues or organising collective action. The aim is not for everyone to do exactly the same things, but for each union representative to receive support with the tasks that matter most at their workplace.

Greater flexibility for union representatives

The union representative training programme has also changed. Instead of having to attend every regular course during the working year, union representatives now register for at least five of the six courses.

This gives representatives greater flexibility to choose courses according to their interests, knowledge and circumstances. It also leaves more of their paid leave entitlement available for other training offered by the union that supports them in their role.

This winter's courses cover topics including participation in union activities, workplace meetings, pay and conditions, payslips, labour rights, workplace organising and collective bargaining. Union representatives who attend at least four courses between September and April will be invited to the spring trip on May 27th.

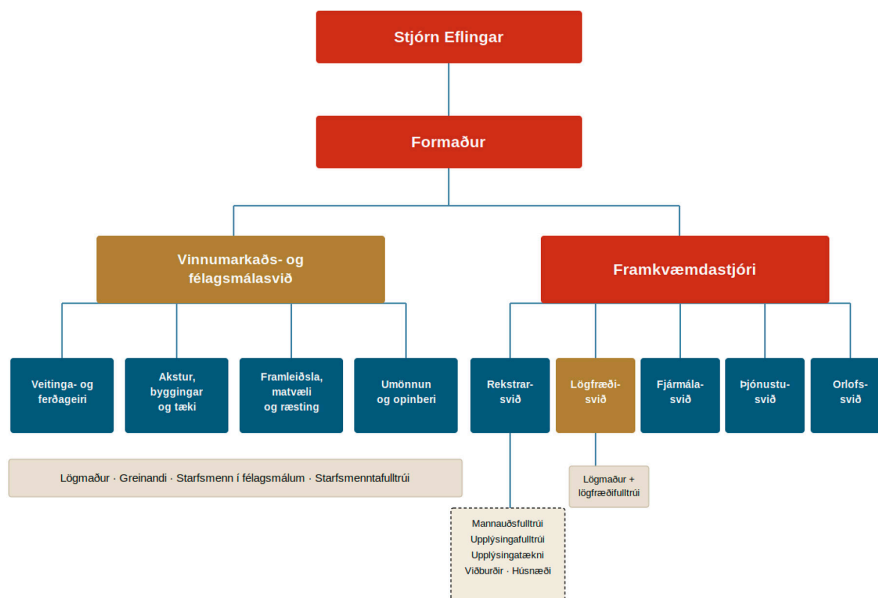
The work plans will make the union's support more focused and consistent. Union representatives do not stand alone: they have a clear plan, access to advice and a strong network of fellow representatives behind them.

Office changes strengthen support for members

Efling's board has approved a reorganisation of the union's office operations. The aim is to strengthen ties between the office and members and better support their empowerment. The changes were presented to staff on September 2nd and are scheduled to be fully implemented by the end of the year.

A new Labour Market and Membership Affairs Department will represent members' interests in dealings with employers, including collective bargaining, casework and support for union representatives. It will take over the responsibilities of the Labour Rights Department and the Education and Membership Affairs Department, both of which will be discontinued. Viðar Þorsteinsson will head the new department.

A Legal Department will also be established to handle debt recovery cases, alongside an Operations Department responsible for the office's shared operational matters. All staff will retain their jobs, and staffing levels will increase.



Organisational chart showing the new structure of Efling's office.

For union representatives and other members, an important aspect of the changes is that support for workplace activities, case resolution and the fight for better pay and conditions will come under the same department. According to Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir,

Chair of Efling, the changes are intended to strengthen the office's ties with members. The expanded operations will also create opportunities to bring tasks in-house and make better use of the union's funds.

The best labour market model in the world?

Strong trade unions are the foundation of good living standards

Does the trade union movement have too much influence in Iceland? Are wages rising too much, and is it too easy to go on strike? Stefán Ólafsson, Professor Emeritus and an expert at Efling, rejects these claims in an article on the union's website. He argues that there is a strong case for Iceland's labour market model being the best in the world from the perspective of working people.

The term "labour market model" describes how relations between workers and employers are organised, including collective bargaining. Union membership is exceptionally high in Iceland, and bargaining rights rest with individual unions. Members themselves vote on the outcome of negotiations.

Stefán points out that strong worker organisation has played a major role in improving living standards and achieving a more equal distribution of income. This has also gone hand



A strong case can be made that Iceland's labour market model is the best in the world.

in hand with a strong economy and high corporate profits. Good pay and conditions for workers are therefore compatible with a thriving business sector.

In Stefán's view, the model can continue to develop, but any changes must be made in full consultation with the trade union movement and without

weakening its influence. For members, this is about defending their voice and their right to bargain collectively over pay and working conditions.

Scan the QR code to read Stefán's article in full on Efling's website.



International cooperation against social dumping



From left: Viðar Þorsteinsson, Zeynep Bicici, President of UNI Europa Property Services, and Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir.

Efling at a European conference for cleaning workers and security guards

How can we ensure that competition between companies does not come at the expense of pay and working conditions? This was one of the questions addressed at a European conference of trade unions representing cleaning workers and security guards, held in Paris in late June.

Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir and Viðar Þorsteinsson attended on behalf of Efling. The conference was organised by UNI Europa Property Services, which coordinates cooperation between European trade unions in these sectors. Efling joined UNI Global Union at the beginning of the year.

Topics included moving cleaning work to daytime hours and strengthening requirements to protect workers' rights in public procurement. The aim is to prevent competitive tendering from encouraging companies to cut costs by undermining pay and conditions and increasing workloads.



Viðar Þorsteinsson described Efling's work to ensure transparency and the correct implementation of collective agreement provisions on cleaning workers' work rates.

Viðar took part in a panel discussion comparing collective agreements across Europe and described Efling's work to monitor work rates and conditions in the cleaning sector.

Many large cleaning and security companies operate across borders.

By sharing information and working together, trade unions can strengthen their position in dealings with these companies and draw on one another's experience in the fight for better pay and conditions.

Efling active in Nordic cooperation among cleaning workers



Nordic trade union delegates gathered in Finland to share experiences and strengthen cooperation among cleaning workers.

Workplace organising, collective agreements and working conditions were the focus when Efling delegates attended a Nordic conference and training programme for cleaning workers' union representatives in Finland in early September. Around 30 union representatives and other trade union delegates gathered from Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Sweden, Finland and Norway.

The conference was held by Lake Tuusula, just north of Helsinki, and organised by SUN, an alliance of Nordic trade unions. The first full day was devoted to workplace organising training led by Kjetil Larsen from the Norwegian union Fellesforbundet.

Efling made a particular contribution through a detailed comparative survey of collective agreements for

cleaning workers across the Nordic countries. Efling staff member Sunna Björg Gunnarsdóttir presented the findings, prompting extensive discussion. Participants also discussed cleaning workers' working conditions and the unions' experiences of fighting for better pay and conditions.

Most participants were union representatives themselves. Some carry out the role as a full-time paid position at large cleaning companies, while others represented cleaning workers employed directly by public bodies. This cooperation provides an opportunity to compare conditions and learn from different approaches to defending workers' rights.

Social activities and team-building were also an important part of the programme, including games and rowing on the lake. The conference was chaired by Viðar Þorsteinsson, who chairs SUN's cleaning sector group.

Union representative of the month: - Christine Linda Whalley



Christine is the union representative for Efling members at Árborg preschool.

What do you most enjoy doing outside work?

I really enjoy relaxing at home, but I also love travelling, exploring new places and enjoying good food. I love spending my free time in good company with the people closest to me.

What stands out most from your summer?

What stands out most is a trip to England with my family to say a final goodbye to my grandmother. It was both a beautiful and a difficult trip, but I also got to revisit the places where I grew up and see my family again.

What have you learned as a union representative that also helps you outside work?

I think the most important thing I have learned as a union representative is to listen carefully to people and try to see things from different perspectives. You also learn to be

patient, understanding and there for others. That definitely helps me in everyday life outside work, too.

What do you find most rewarding about working at a preschool, and what do you wish more people understood about the job?

The most rewarding part is watching the children grow, learn and thrive, and getting to be part of this stage in their lives. I wish more people understood how varied and demanding the work is. It is not just about looking after children: it involves nurturing, teaching, communication, planning and a great deal of responsibility. You need patience, professionalism and a huge heart.

Can you describe a situation in your work as a union representative when you felt that solidarity among members made a difference?

I have been incredibly lucky with my workplace and my colleagues. Noth-

ing has come up that we have not been able to resolve together. To me, that shows how important solidarity, trust and good communication are in the workplace.

What do you think helps most in building solidarity among colleagues?

For me, it matters that we respect one another, listen and help each other out. But what matters most is having fun and being able to laugh together. A workplace without laughter is not somewhere I would want to work.

What would you most like to achieve as a union representative in the coming working year?

I want to be there for my colleagues, listen and help us find solutions together if anything comes up. To me, what matters most is that we stand together so that everyone feels good at work.